EXCAVATIONS IN AREA III ON TALL ZAR'Ā

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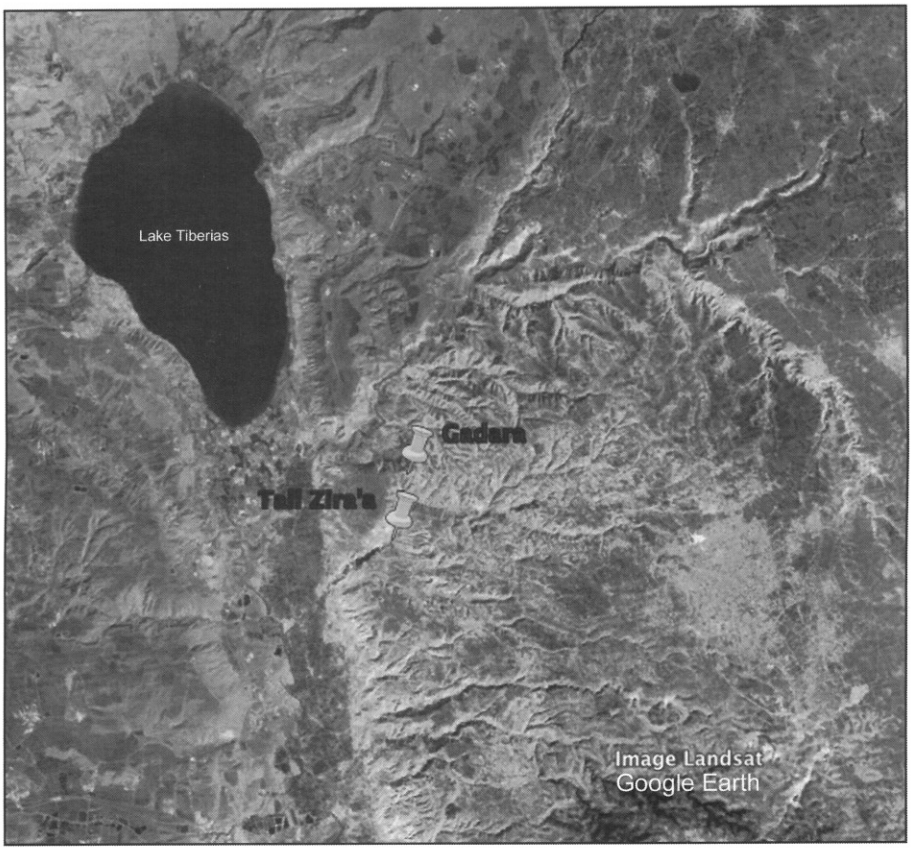
Tall Zar'ā and the 'Gadara Region Project' (F. Kenkel)

The campaign of the "Gadara Region Project" in 2014 took place between the 29th of April and the 29th of May in Umm Qays. The "Gadara Region Project" was initiated by the Biblical Archaeological Institute in Wuppertal, Germany, with its director Dieter Vieweger in 2001. The focus of the first two years was to conduct a survey on Tall Zar'ā to find the most promising areas on the plateau to excavate. Excavations have been taking place since 2003. Due to the fact that the "Gadara Region Project" was going to continue for at least 20 years, the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal started a close cooperation with the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Amman in 2004 and its director at that time, Jutta Häser. Since 2006, the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem has also been involved. Dieter Vieweger and Jutta Häser are the directors of the "Gadara Region Project" until today (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 4). Tall Zar'ā is the main excavation site of the "Gadara Region Project" that is joined by a hinterland survey, the Wādī al-'Arab Survey, which was conducted between 2009 and 2012 by Katja Soennecken and Patrick Leiverkus. From 2012 until probably 2017 no major excavations have been and will be undertaken, because the main aim of the project at this time is to publish everything that has been uncovered since its beginnings.

The main focus of the 2014 campaign, directed by Dieter Vieweger and Jutta Häser was with the publication of the results of the past excavations on Tall Zar'ā. In addition, geophysical investigations and archaeometric measurements of various metal and glass finds from the excavations were carried out by Robert Lehmann and Marie Schulze (Leibniz University Hannover) and Linda Whittaker led the first archaeobotanical research on samples from the site. In Area III on top of the tell (Byzantine and Mamluk period), Ursula Rothe and Frauke Kenkel opened and excavated a test trench in the first two weeks of the campaign in the context of a CBRL-funded pilot project to clarify questions concerning the extension and chronology of the building to aid in the planning of a larger project in the Area.

Furthermore, various groups of finds have been worked through, such as the stone tools, metal and glass from the classical periods as well as the Bronze and Iron Age pottery. Stefanie Hoss undertook analyses of the Hellenistic to Umayyad glass from the tell within a project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Susan Schütz worked on the stratigraphy of the Roman Tall Zar'ā as part of her PhD thesis, while Katja Soennecken dealt with the transition period from the Bronze to the Iron Age in her PhD thesis.

Tall Zar'ā is located in the Wādī al-'Arab, only 4.5 km southwest of Gadara (modern Umm Qays) **(Fig. 1).** This wadi is connected to the Jordan Valley and therefore the Mediterranean coast with the East Jordanian Highland. In the Bronze and Iron Age periods it was part of a prominent trade route between Egypt and Syria and Mesopotamia (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 5). The tell itself rises 22-40 m above ground level, depending on the surroundings in the wadi; its



1. Map of the north-western part of Jordan with the sites Tall Zar'ā and Gadara marked (by Google earth).

highest point is situated 17 m below sea level and it has a diameter of 240 m at its bottom and 160 m on the plateau **(Fig. 2).** In addition to its important strategic position at the entrance to the Wādī al-'Arab, this site has an artesian spring that provided the plateau with fresh water until 2011. The excavations cover an uninterrupted sequence from the Early Bronze Age to the Islamic period – the last documented settlement was in 1885 by Schumacher (Vieweger – Häser 2008: 375-395). Altogether three different Areas (I-III) have been excavated since the beginning of the project **(Fig. 3)**. Excavation Area I is located on the northwestern slope of Tall Zar'ā. By the end of the season in 2011, 1750m^2 had been excavated, which equals 70 squares measuring 5 m by 5 m. A sequence from the Early Bronze Age until the Umayyad period has been revealed in this area (Häser – Vieweger 2012: 251-267). Excavations in Area II, which is situated on the northern edge of the tell, started in 2006 and continued until 2011. The strata, which date from the Late Hellenistic to the Umayyad period, have been revealed across 1500m^2. Area II is the second highest and most protected area of the tell plateau. Only Area III in the south of the plateau is situated higher, and measures more than 600 m^2 in size. Work in that area began in 2007 with a survey, measurements and test trenches. First excavations were undertaken in 2008. In 2014 only a few squares were opened to answer questions about the size and chronology of the huge excavated building structure in that area.

From the pottery and architectural remains as well as due to correlation with historical events, it could be concluded that the settlement on Tall Zar'ā was modified several times between the Early Bronze Age and the Islamic period (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 16-41). Some house structures can be connected with the Early Bronze Age period. Within the transition period of the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze Age period only a few storage pits and hearths as well as some walls were found (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 16-19). In The Middle Bronze Age

2. Aerial picture of Tall Zar'ā with all three excavation areas visible (photo: APAAME_20111002_DLK-0759).

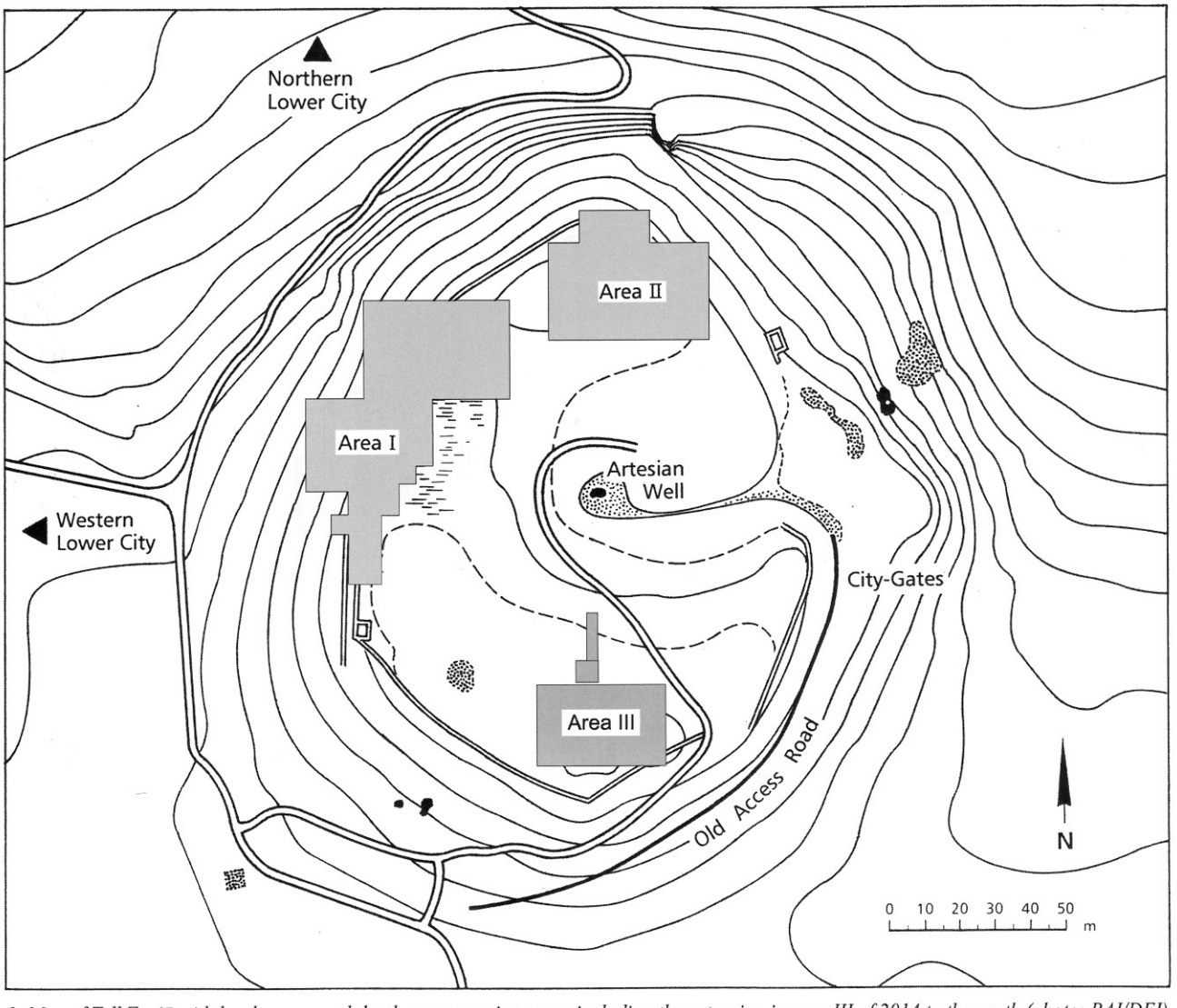
houses and workshops were excavated in Area I. After a landslide in the Late Bronze Age, the settlement became a big city, with a city wall, temples, houses and workshops (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 20-25). The Late Bronze Age city was destroyed in around 1200 BC but resettled in the Iron Age period (Häser – Vieweger 2012: 258-260). In the Iron Age II period it became more consolidated and the architectural remains give the impression of a bigger settlement again, more city-like than in the period before (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 30). At the end of the 8th century BC, this settlement lost its urban character again and only some houses remained on the plateau (Vieweger – Häser 2013: 32).

In the Early Hellenistic period, Tall Zar'ā was most likely a fortified checkpoint at one of the smaller access roads to Gadara. In the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman period, this was expanded into a civilian settlement with a large building complex that was found mainly in Area II so far. Probably in the 2nd century AD the settlement was scaled back to a track marshal. Most likely at the beginning of the 4th century AD a uniformly-designed settlement was built on top of the whole plateau, which became an important agricultural centre, after numerous extensions and conversions, with its main building in today's Area III (Kenkel 2012: 308-324). The settlement on the tell prospered in the Byzantine and Umayyad period. In later Islamic periods some areas were still in use but on a smaller scale.

The 2014 Area III Excavations (Figs. 4-9) (U. Rothe)

Introduction:

Excavation work conducted by the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology and the Biblical Archaeological Institute in Summer 2008 in Area III, in the southern part of the tell plateau on Tall Zar'ā, uncovered a series of building remains dating to the late Byzantine, Umayyad, Mamluk and Ottoman eras (Vieweger-Häser 2008). The original Byzantine



3. Map of Tall Zar'ā with level curves and the three excavation areas including the extension in area III of 2014 to the north (photo: BAI/DEI).

building consisted of a large courtyard with a gate entrance on the western side and a series of ca. 5 m x 5 m rooms around the northern, southern and eastern sides (Häser 2013). The mosaic paving surface of the courtyard was discovered on the final day of excavations and had seemed to be of plain grey/white tesserae. As there was no time to excavate it properly, it was reburied to protect it for the future. Although 500 m^2 of the structure were opened up in 2008, the excavation failed to find the edge of it in any direction except to the south, where the slope of the tell formed a topographical limit. It was clear that the structure had been modified and reused in the Umayyad period, and the ruins of these earlier structures provided the basis and materials for later, smaller buildings of the Mamluk and Ottoman periods.

It was not clear from the excavated remains what the original Byzantine structure had been. A largely intact oil press in the eastern part of the excavated area indicated agricultural activities, and extensive contemporaneous structures in Area II in the north of the tell plateau (Häser –Vieweger 2012) had since suggested the tell was home to a considerable settlement in the Byzantine era, with workshops, storage areas and further agricultural activity. Finds of thousands of both large and very small tesserae on the surface in Area III pointed to the structure

there playing a central role in the complex. In light of this, two possibilities were mooted: 1. that the site had been a large rural estate, or 2. that it had been a monastery.

In Spring 2014 (4th-18th May), Ursula Rothe of the Open University (UK) restarted the project in Area III, and, in collaboration with Frauke Kenkel from the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Amman and funded by the Council for British Research in the Levant, conducted a small pilot excavation to the north of the previously excavated area. The objective was to determine the dimensions of the complex, and any further information as to its identity, so as to provide the basic information needed in order to plan a larger project aimed at uncovering the whole structure in Area III.

The Tall Zar'ā Mosaic

While the main purpose of the Spring 2014 season was to gain further information about the complex, upon arrival at the site the excavators discovered that the area of mosaic floor in the previous trenches that had been reburied in 2008 had been dug open and damaged, and also that what had seemed to be plain tesserae emerged now, after having been exposed to the elements, as having different colours and displaying an inscription in ancient Greek. It was decided that the first priority should be to look after this very precious mosaic, which is the only inscription so far retrieved from Tall Zar'ā, and one of only few inscriptions from the region in general. First, the mosaic was excavated and exposed by carefully scratching away the very hard layer of lime that had concealed the detail in the first place. It was then measured and photographed from various angles, and tesserae lying in the vicinity that originally belonged to the mosaic were collected in the hope that some of the lacunae could be restored. It was felt that due to the damage that had already been done, it would be preferable for the mosaic to be salvaged and taken to a safe place, and this was also the opinion of the Department of Antiquities, who sent Amjad Bataineh from the regional Department headquarters in Irbid to assess the situation. The mosaic was expertly lifted by members of the Department of Antiquities on the 18th May 2014 and taken away for restoration. Further details as to the wording of the mosaic and its implications can be found in the next section.

The Test Trench

A test trench 15 m long (with a balk after 10 m) was dug from the northern edge of the previously excavated area. It was L-shaped to accommodate the corner of a previously excavated structure to the south. The test trench ran over three squares in the general Tall Zar'ā grid, from south to north: Y 125, Z 125 and AA 125. A succession of layers and structures were uncovered which will be summarised in the following.

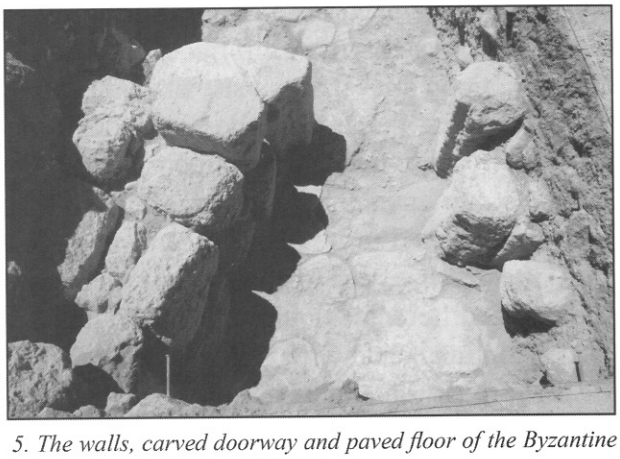
Roman or Byzantine: Below the main Byzantine-period structures in trench Y 125 that correspond to the structure with the inscription mosaic further to the south, a wall was discovered. It is at a slightly different angle to the structures above, and appears to belong to an earlier building. It was covered by a layer of backfill.

Byzantine: This occupation layer was also only attested in trench Y 125. In this layer, a room is formed by a wall in the north and one in the south. There is a doorway in the northern wall. A stone toward the outside of the doorway at the bottom (western side) has a hole worked into it – presumably for a door. A hard mortar floor to the south of the southern wall and a hard mud floor with cobblestones to the north of it within the room belong to this phase, as do several subsequent hard loam floor layers. In one of these, four coins were found, dating it to some time in the 4th or 5th century AD. This structure is then apparently destroyed: The hard mortar floor is filled with a backfill layer, a wooden construction above the room to the north of the southern wall burns down and creates an ash and charcoal layer with an intact burnt beam. This may have been earthquake damage: seismic events are known in the area

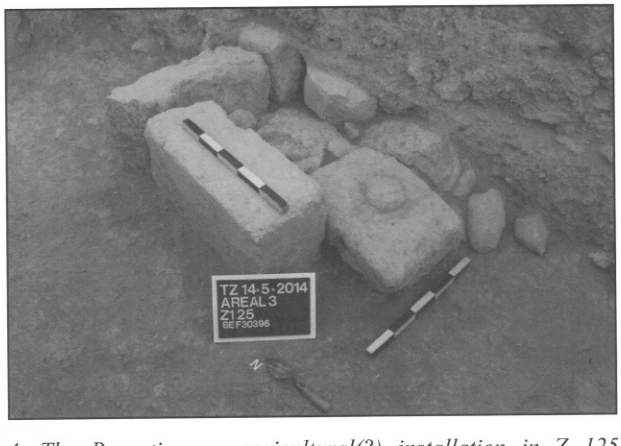
for AD 363, 419, 447, 551, 580 and 631/632, 659/660 (Amiran *et al.* 1994).

Byzantine-Umayyad (until 749 AD): This layer corresponds to the main Byzantine-period structures (which now turn out to be a monastery: see discussion of mosaic below) in the earlier excavation and is found across the three squares of the test trench. In Y 125, the previous southern and northern walls continue to be used. The doorway in the northern wall receives a step up to a new floor level which is paved using plain white mosaic stones roughly 2.5cm^3 (similar to those in the courtyard of the old excavation and common in monasteries in this region in the Byzantine period: Hirschfeld 1992, 65f.). This floor is at the same height as the partially intact mosaic floor with inscription in the earlier excavation (dated in the inscription to AD 709). In Z 125, outside the doorway in the northern wall and stepping down circa 30 cm is an open space with a hard loam surface that houses some kind of (agricultural?) installation **(Fig. 4)**. Behind that to the north is a further small building evidenced in two walls and a doorway with carved stones. The room is paved with flat stones and sealed with very hard loam **(Fig. 5)**. Further to the north in AA 125, the paved floor from Z 125 continues. At some stage immediately following this phase, a new floor was added on top of the existing paving and floor. The most important find in this trench was a large wall, circa 75 cm wide, constructed using two rows of dressed header and stretcher stones, and the intervening space filled using large field stones **(Fig. 6)**. It appears to be a boundary wall for the complex (perhaps the edge of the core monastery precinct). The ground to the north of it is in any case very different to anything found further south in any of the trenches, consisting of dark brown/red earth peppered with small stones and suggesting it lay 'outside' the complex to the south.

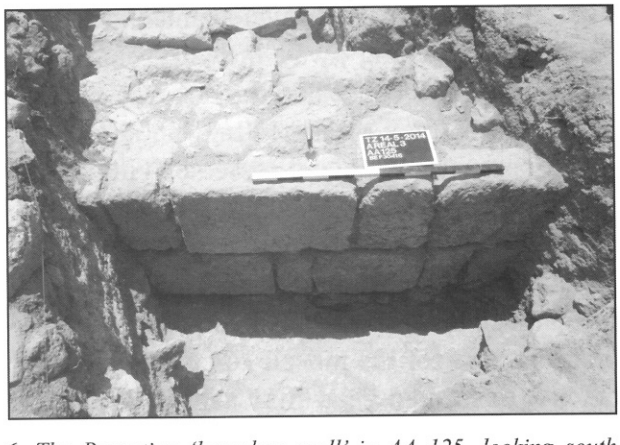
The condition in which these structures were found points to them being destroyed in a single, catastrophic event and that this event was probably seismic. In Y 125, the mosaic floor was uncovered in a completely destroyed state. The stones were still inside the original mortar but entirely dislodged. We were unable to find even the smallest remaining section intact. Burnt beams also suggest a wooden roof



5. The walls, carved doorway and paved floor of the Byzantine era in Z 125 (photo: BAI/DEI).



4. The Byzantine-era agricultural(?) installation in Z 125 (photo: BAI/DEI).



6. The Byzantine 'boundary wall' in AA 125, looking south (photo: BAI/DEI).

that burnt and collapsed. The other squares also revealed a layer of collapsed debris within the confines of the 'boundary wall', but not outside it. It seems likely that the destruction is connected with the major earthquake (or series of earthquakes: Ambraseys 2005) that befell the region in around AD 749, resulting in large loss of life and widespread destruction in nearby Tiberias, Gadara, Pella, Jerash and Skythopolis (Tsafrir and Foerster 1989; Marco *et al.* 2003).

Abbasid-(Mamluk)

Some time appears to have passed before reoccupation, as the whole area becomes covered in a layer of backfill and soil. The buildings are, however, reoccupied: In the main building in Y 125, the doorway in the northern wall is now completely walled in to a new floor level made of hard loam **(Fig. 7)**. A new layer of walling is built on top, represented by an upright worked stone. A step is added within the room to the west of the doorway (leading out of the trench). A new wall is added to the west. The southern wall is no longer in use, and a tabun oven is built in the eastern part of the room **(Fig. 8)**. Later, this floor receives a new layer and a new tabun, and the older tabun receives a small surrounding wall. In the north, the 'boundary wall' is still in use, and forms the northern edge of a structure with a new wall going out at a right angle from it. The doorway with carved stone frame in Z 125 is walled up. A single row of large field stones is laid between the SW corner of this wall to the doorway of the main building in Y 125. The former agricultural installation may still be in use. 'Outside' the 'boundary wall' to the north a rubbish pit is dug containing a great deal of sherds of Late Byzantine-Early Umayyad cooking and storage vessels ('bag jars'). Several occupation layers can be found across the whole site within these structures that contain pottery dating to the Umayyad, Abbasid and Mamluk periods, suggesting low-intensity occupation over a long period of time.

Mamluk1: The preceding structures are destroyed or fall into disuse and the entire area is covered in a layer of debris and backfill. On top of them, entirely new structures are built that bear no or little relation to the older ones and date to the Mamluk period. In Y 125, a wall runs through the centre of the trench, where there seems to have been some kind of doorway. Another runs perpendicular to this. Within this and to either side of the wall is a cobbled area which peters off into a floor/occupation layer to the south. In the north, the tabun ovens have been filled in and a new floor of hard, white loam has been installed. The cobbled area partially covers this. At some stage the doorway was blocked **(Fig. 9)**. In the north of the area in square AA 125, two new walls are built on top of the Byzantine 'boundary wall', using this partially as a foundation base. Together with further new

7. The doorway to the room in Y 125 walled in to a new level in the Abbasid(-Mamluk) period (photo: BAI/DEI).

8. Abbasid(-Mamluk)-era tabun oven in Y 125 (photo: BAI/DEI).

9. The walling-in of the doorway in Y 125 dating to the Mamluk period (photo: BAI/DEI).

walls to the north they form a series of small rooms. In the intervening area in square Z 125, no new structures are built but there is a clear occupation layer containing a hearth.

Mamluk2: Sometime in the later Mamluk period the former structures fall into disuse and are rebuilt haphazardly: several new walls are built at various stages using the older ones for support, and a series of occupation layers suggest small-scale occupation.

Area III: Some Comments on the Imported Pottery – (Fig. 10: 1-13) (F. Kenkel)

The pottery examples discussed here were chosen to show the imported wares during the Late Byzantine–Early Islamic period. They are accompanied by some oil lamps that are easily distinguishable and datable. These examples are therefore very important for the stratigraphy of Area III.

Beside the chosen examples, the pottery material of Area III contains a lot of Byzantine-Umayyad amphorae, some Byzantine-Early Islamic basins of a coarse and chaff tempered fabric, as well as lots of Byzantine-Islamic cooking vessels. But the main category is jars, jugs and bowls from the Mamluk period, mainly from the 15th century AD. Some lids and huge storage vessels, 12 tiles, some plates and sieves, one cup and one fragment of an Ottoman pipe accompany these main categories. So far, only the examples from the so-called classical periods have been evaluated further. Especially the pottery of the Islamic period still needs further research.

The material presented below consists of three examples of African Red Slip Ware (**Fig. 11: 1-3**), five examples of Late Roman C Ware (**Fig. 10: 4-8**) and five oil lamps (fragmentary and complete, **Fig. 10: 9-13**).

African Red Slip Ware (ARSW) is one of the leading fine wares in most of the parts of the Mediterranean world for several centuries (Hayes 1972: 13). The clay is rather coarse and has a colour range from orange-red to brick-red. The slip is a refined version of the body clay and of good quality but without the glossiness of that on terra sigillata (Hayes 1972: 14). Within the pottery assemblage of Tall Zarʿā, this group is rather scarce. The three examples from Area III and only one example from Area II are all the instances that could be found so far. But this picture is also well known from other sites in northern Jordan. ARSW is mainly to be found in North Africa, Greece and the western Mediterranean. In the eastern Mediterranean, Late Roman C Ware (LRCW) is the leading import ware, especially during the 4th–7th centuries AD (Kenkel 2012: 90-91). The 22 examples of LRCW from Area III and the far higher amount of this group from the other two areas on the tell support this picture. Like in the material from Areas I and II, Hayes Form 3 is the most common one in Area III (Kenkel 2012: 91). No Cypriot Red Slip Ware (CRWS) has been found so far in Area III, although it was found in the other areas. But like ARSW, CRSW is not very common in this region of the eastern Mediterranean.

Only two of the five oil lamps could be dated more precisely due to their conservation status. These two examples belong to the group of so-called "Jerash lamps" that were produced mainly in the north of Jordan (Hirschfeld 1997: 325; Kenkel 2012: 295). They can be dated from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th century AD but were in use until the mid 9th

Table 1: Imported pottery and oil lamps – Tall Zar'ā, Area III (table: F. Kenkel).

No	Type	Inv.No.	Square	Context	stratum	Fabric group	Date
1	bowl	TZ 300092-013	V 125	30159	00	ARS	mid-late 5th-6th cent. AD
2	bowl	TZ 300013-001	X 126	30020	00	ARS	550 – 625 AD
3	bowl	TZ 300011-003	V 123	30024	00	ARS	550 – 625 AD
4	bowl	TZ 300011-004	V 123	30024	00	LRC	6th cent. AD
5	bowl	TZ 300013-002	X 126	30024	00	LRC	6th cent. AD
6	bowl	TZ 300089-002	U 123	30134	05	LRC	late 6th–early 7th cent. AD
7	bowl	TZ 300041-001	X 125	30084	00	LRC	late 6th–early 7th cent. AD
8	bowl	TZ 300029-006	W 125	30030	00	LRC	late 6th–early 7th cent. AD
9	Oil lamp	TZ 300198-009	Y 125	30354	02	Is Bu2Br	late Byzantine–Umayyad
10	oil lamp	TZ 300104-015	W 125	30118	05	Is Grey	late Byzantine–Umayyad
11	oil lamp	TZ 300026-026	V 123	30024	00	Cl Red2Br	late 3rd–early 4th cent. AD
12	oil lamp	TZ 300033-009	X 128	30035	00	Cl Bu2Br-f	late 3rd–early 4th cent. AD
13	oil lamp	TZ 300020-021	X 128	30035	00	Cl Red-bu2br core	1st–3rd cent. AD

century AD (Kenkel 2012: 296).

The material presented here can be dated mainly within the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th century AD, with three exceptions that are the fragments of oil lamps dated to the Roman period. There are some Eastern Sigillata A fragments that – together with the lamp fragments – hint to an earlier occupation phase in Area III, but the major part of the material clearly dates to the late Byzantine–Early Islamic period. However, the majority of the material – not presented here – is glazed ware and especially painted vessels of the Mamluk period, mainly from the 13th–15th century AD.

Imported Pottery and Oil Lamps from Tall Zar'ā – Area III (Fig.10: 1-13)

African Red Slip Ware

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Rather deep bowl with plain rim and overhanging rounded downturned flange.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 1
Est. D. (max): 17 cm
Parallel: Mid-late 5th–6th century AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 26, Form 91, 92
Note: A broad flange characterizes the earlier examples of this type with a heavy lip at a sharp angle. The example shown has a broad but more rounded flange.

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Large bowl with sloping wall turning into a thickened and knobbed rim.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 2
Est. D. (max): 30 cm
Parallel: 550-625 AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 30, Form 104, C23
Note: –

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Large bowl with sloping wall turning into a thickened and knobbed rim.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 3
Est. D. (max): 40 cm
Parallel: 550-625 AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 30, Form 104, C23
Note: –

Late Roman C Ware

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Rim with concave outside and flat underside that can appear quite broad and has a small ridge at the junction to the wall. This bowl type normally appears with a ringfoot base.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 4
Est. D. (max): 20 cm
Parallel: 6th century AD: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 13, LRCW3.9
Note: This type is one of the most common

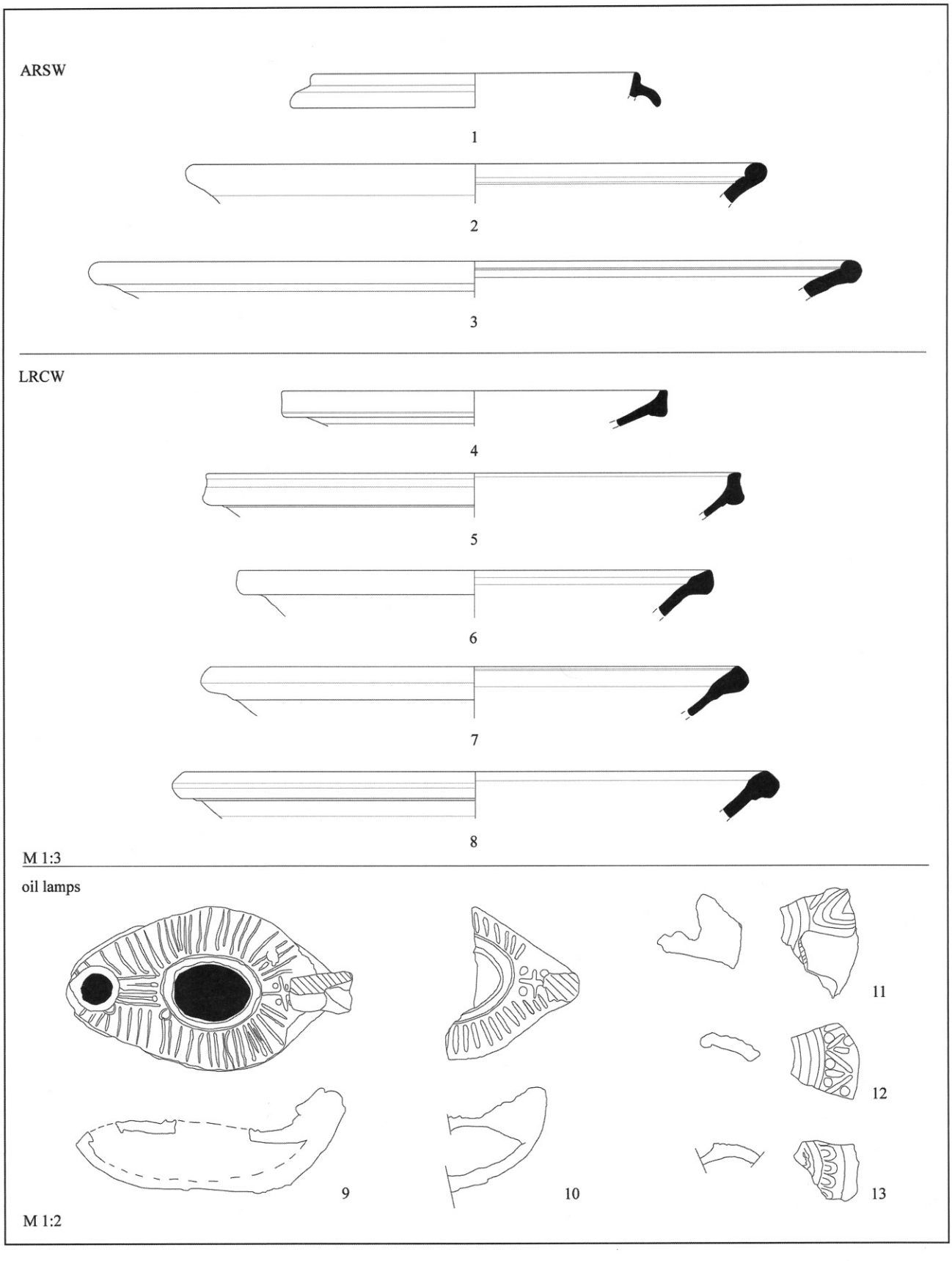


Fig.10: 1-13 Imported pottery and oil lamps – Tall Zar'ā, Area III (drawings: F. Kenkel).

forms within the excavation on Tall Zar'ā and belongs to Hayes type 3F.

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Rim with concave outside and flat underside that can appear quite broad and has a small ridge at the junction to the wall. This bowl type normally appears with a ringfoot base.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 5
Est. D. (max): 28 cm
Parallel: 6th century AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 69, Form 3, F23; Kenkel 2012, Tl. 13, LRCW3.6
Note: This type is one of the most common forms within the excavation on Tall Zar'ā and belongs to Hayes type 3F.

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Bowl with heavy rim and squarish profile.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 6
Est. D. (max): 25 cm
Parallel: Late 6th–early 7th century AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 71, Form 10 A, 11-12
Note: –

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Bowl with heavy rim and squarish profile.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 7
Est. D. (max): 28 cm
Parallel: Early-mid 7th century AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 71, Form 10 C, 14
Note: –

Type: Bowl
Rim Form: Bowl with heavy rim and squarish profile.
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 8
Est. D. (max): 31
Parallel: Late 6th–early 7th century AD: Hayes 1972, Fig. 71, Form 10 A, 2
Note: –

Oil Lamps
Type: Oil lamp
Form: So called "Jerash-lamp"
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 9
Est. D. (max): –
Parallel: Late Byzantine–Umayyad: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 53, La90
Note: This type of lamp was produced mainly in northern Jordan, most probably in Jerash (Hirschfeld 1997: 325). The handle was usually a handmade zoomorphic one.

Type: Oil lamp
Form: Fragment of so called "Jerash-lamp"
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 10
Est. D. (max): –
Parallel: Late Byzantine–Umayyad: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 53, La90
Note: This type of lamp was produced mainly in northern Jordan, most probably in Jerash (Hirschfeld 1997: 325). The handle was usually a handmade zoomorphic one.

Type: Oil lamp
Form: Fragment of mould-made lamp
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 11
Est. D. (max): –
Parallel: Late 3rd–early 4th century AD: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 58, La70-La75
Note: It is difficult to date small fragments like this , but because of the fabric and the estimated shape it is most probably from the Roman–early Byzantine period.

Type: Oil lamp
Form: Fragment of mould-made lamp with a bow-shaped nozzle
Figure References: Tl. A, Fig. 12
Est. D. (max): –
Parallel: Late 3rd–early 4th century AD: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 57, La69
Note: Could also be a fragment of a so-called "Galilean lamp" from the 5th-6th century AD, but it is hard to judge because of the fragmentary piece.

Type: Oil lamp
Form: Fragment of mould-made lamp with a concave discus and a short, rounded nozzle

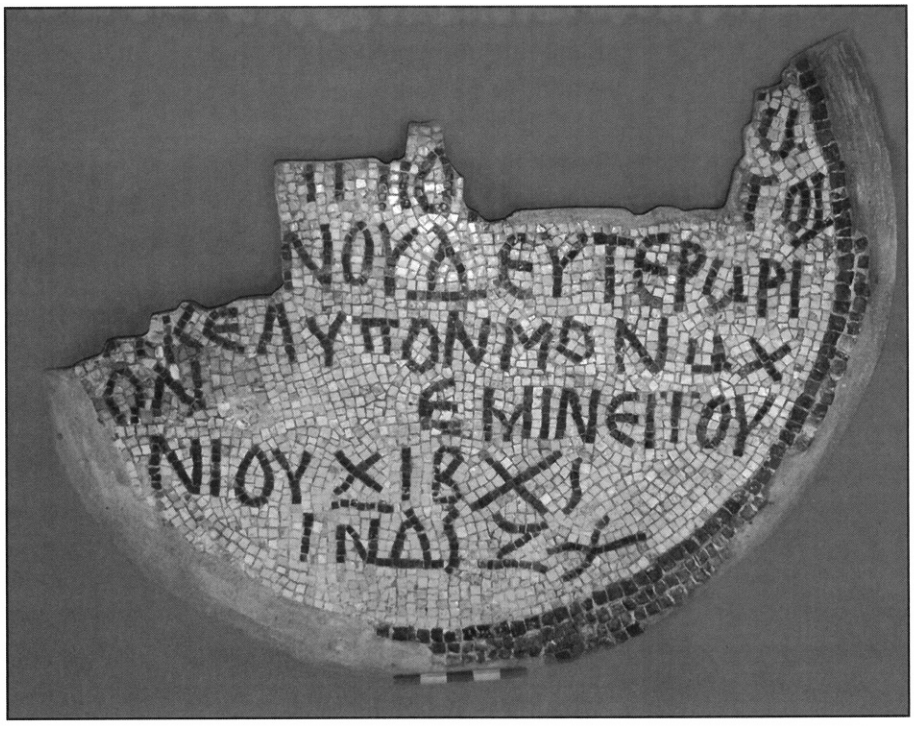
Figure References: Pl. A, Fig. 13
Est. D. (max): –
Parallel: 1st–3rd century AD: Kenkel 2012, Pl. 56, La58
Note: Based on the decoration, this fragment is dated to the Roman period.The Area III Inscription (A. Zerbini) **(Fig. 11)**

The Area III Inscription (A. Zerbini) **(Fig. 11)**

During the 2014 campaign at Tall Zar'ā, an inscription was found in the excavations of Area III (Fig. 10). The text is set in a partially preserved mosaic medallion, the original diameter of which must have been ca. 160 cm. The inscribed field measured ca. 140 cm in diameter, while the frame, made up of concentric circles of black, red (two rows) and again black tesserae was at least 10-12 cm in width. The medallion was removed before the end of the excavation season and re-assembled at the mosaic storage site of Tabarbour (Amman). Restoration work has been carried out by Mohammad al-Shiyab and Ziad Aziz of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. Height of letters: 5.5-12 cm.

[Two more lines?] |[- - -][.]α|[- - -ca. 6 - - -] [...]ιο[- - -c. 6- - -] τοῦ| [....]νου δευτεραρί|ου κὲ λυποῦν μοναχ||ῶν ἐ(ν) μινεί Ἰου|νίου χιβ' χ(ρόνων) | ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ζ'

The *alpha* is written throughout using the cursive form with open top. This is rare in inscriptions, but attested from the sixth cenutry onwards (e.g. Mouterde & Poidebard 1945: 209 (Hierapolis, AD 542-8), Canova 1954 n.222 l. 3 (Kerak, 6th c.), CIIP 1548 (Caesarea, 3rd-6th c.), 2470 (Gaza, AD 540)); l. 2, the *tau* could also be a *gamma*; the *upsilon* is written in the cursive form (Jordanian comparanda: Canova 1954 n. 242 ('Ayyun, AD 620/1), I.Gerasa 73 (Jerash, late-3rd c.)); l. 3,]νου probably Ἰωάννου should be read (suggestion by J.Niehoff);l. 4, κὲ for καὶ; λυποῦν μοναχῶν for λοιπῶν μοναχῶν, with the common omega – omicron replacement; *upsilon* for OI is also attested (e.g. IGLS XIII/2 9773-4; 9572); l. 5, μινεί for μηνί; *trema* on the iota of Ἰουνίου; l. 6, χ(ρόνων) is an unusual abbreviated form; much more frequent are χρ(όνων) and ἐν χρ(όνοις).



11. The mosaic inscription found on Tall Zar'ā (photo: K. Takeshi).

"(the work was carried out under?)… (and) Ioan]nes (?), the deuterarios, and all the other monks in the month of June, year 612 in the time of the 7th indiction (AD 709)"

This inscription must have commemorated the completion of construction or mosaicking works carried out in this building. Despite its fragmentary state, it reveals a number of elements of great historical significance, which we will now proceed to briefly outline (a fuller discussion may be found in *Zerbini et al.* First, the inscription serves as confirmation of the presence of a monastic establishment in the vicinity or, more likely, on the site of Tall Zar'ā – an aspect adumbrated by the material evidence discussed above. This is demonstrated by the reference to monks and, more importantly, to a member of the monastic hierarchy, the deuterarios. As the name clearly specifies, the deuterarios acted as the 'second' or deputy to the monastery's superior (*the hegoumen or archimandrites*). The term is attested in the acts of church councils and hagiographies from the 5th to the 8th century (*among others, see Athan.*, doct. Ant. 18 (PG 28 col. 581A); Cyril Scyth., v.Euthym. 48 (ed. Schwartz p.70, 13); ACO III (p.157.18)). References to deuterarioi are much rarer to come by in the epigraphic record. A survey of the epigraphic evidence for Palestine and Arabia conducted by Meimaris (1986: 250) yielded two occurrences (from Skythopolis and St Catherine's monastery in Sinai). Other inscriptions mentioning *deuterarioi* come from Thasos and, possibly, Pylai in Bithynia (see resp. BE 1987 n.452 and 1994 n. 754, with reservations). It is to be expected that, as in the inscription from Skythopolis (Fitzgerald 1939: 16), the name of the hegoumen would have preceded that of his deputy in the Tall Zirāʿa inscription.

Second, the date of the inscription is of particular interest. It contains the denomination of the month in the Julian calendar (June), the civilian year according to the era in use at Tall Zar'ā (612) and the indictional date (7th). This latter was a fiscal reckoning: indictional cycles of 15 years were introduced under Constantine, with the beginning of the first cycle being reckoned in AD 312 (*Chron. Pasc. 522.14-5*). At the time of the Tall Zar'ā inscription, the beginning of the indictional year had long been established at 1 September (Grumel 1958: 193-202). When used together with other dating systems reckoned by eras, the exact beginnings of which are unknown, indictional dates can help clarify them by confirming or denying any of the available alternatives. This is the case with the Tall Zar'ā inscription. Located only a few kilometres south of Gadara, on the south bank of the Wadi al-'Arab, the site has been long assumed to have been part of the territory of this city.[1] Gadara, as inscriptions and coins have shown, used a 'Pompeian era' with its beginning set in the autumn of 64 BC (Meimaris 1992: 79-81). If Tall Zar'ā had been part of the territory of Gadara, the civilian year 612 would correspond to AD 548/9. Yet, June 549 fell within the 12th, not the 7th indiction. Unless a scribal error in either the civilian or the indictional date is factored in, we must assume that another era was in use at Tall Zar'ā. That the latter was the case is strongly suggested also by the order of the numerals in the civilian date of the Tall Zar'ā inscription: while dates by Pompeian eras almost always employ a reversed order of numerals (units, tens and hundreds in succession), the year 612 is written here in its ordinary sequence.

The epigraphic and numismatic evidence has shown that another two eras were in use locally: the era of the provincia Arabia, beginning on 22nd March 106 and in use at Bostra, but also at Adraa *(Dera'a)* and as far south as Husn (south

1. The valley of the wadi al-'Arab is generally assumed to have fallen in the territory of the city of Gadara (e.g. Vieweger and Hüser 2005: 1; Hoffmann 1999: 226). This, however, is based on no direct evidence. In what is by far the most detailed attempt at reconstructing the extent of the chora of Gadara, Weber (2002: 31) left the question of the southern limits of the city's territory open

of Irbid) and Kh. Daraya (ca. 17 km south-west of Irbid); and the era of Capitolias, with its beginning disputed to have been set in either AD 96/7, under Nerva, or AD 97/98 under Trajan.

The synchronism between a civilian and an indictional date in the Tall Zar'ā inscription allows us to reach a definitive solution as regards this issue. The era of the provincia Arabia may be immediately rejected: by that reckoning, June of the year 612 would correspond to June 717 falling in the latter part of a 15th indiction (running from 1st September 716 to 31st August 717). On the other hand, the date of the Tall Zar'ā inscription fits perfectly well with a reckoning by the era of Capitolias as starting in AD 96/7. June of the 612th year could have only been June 709, which indeed matches with a 7th indiction running from 1st September 708 to 31st August 709.

I will return elsewhere to the implications of this conclusion for Capitolias, its era and its territory. As far as Tall Zar'ā is concerned, the date may well suggest that the site belonged to the territory of Capitolias.[2] The latter must have therefore been far bigger than previously assumed, with the Wadi al-'Arab presumably functioning as a northern natural border between this and the territories of Gadara and Abila. Moreover, the date of this inscription proves the existence of a functioning monastic community in what was by then the Umayyad jund al-Urdun. While dedications of churches and inscriptions attesting to restorations in the early to mid-eighth century have become numerous in Transjordan over the last 25 years (Di Segni 2006/7), the Tall Zar'ā inscription is among the latest to clearly stem from a monastic environment.

Finally, the inscription attests to the survival into the early Islamic period of yet another local era, that of Capitolias. This joins the Pompeian era of Gadara, which last appears in an inscription from Hammath Gader dated to AD 662 (Di Segni 1997: 237-40 n.54); the Pompeian era of Philadelphia which appears in a church at Qweismeh dated AD 718/9 (Piccirillo 1984); and the provincial era of Arabia, which is attested in inscriptions as late as the early Abbasid period (e.g. an unpublished funerary inscription from the vicinity of Charakmoaba/ al-Kerak dated to AD 829).

Discussion (U. Rothe)

The two original objectives of the 2014 expedition to Tall Zar'ā were met in the findings of the test trench. We gained a better understanding of the size and spread of the Byzantine complex in this area when we discovered the large wall in square AA 125 that appears to form the northern boundary of the central complex. We also gained a better idea of the various stages involved in this building phase within the complex and of later phases built on top. Having dug to a level approx. 0.5 metres below the level of the intact mosaic in the adjacent square and having discovered an earlier wall at a different angle, it appears that there are no major earlier building phases of the Byzantine complex as we know it, although there are earlier, substantial

2. Unless we follow Di Segni (2006/7: 121) in thinking that, from the sixth century onwards, "city eras ... shook free of the city boundaries". In other words, Di Segni argues that local city eras spread across the limits of their territories. While this theory is corroborated by abundant evidence from Palaestina III (and especially as regards the era of Gaza), the case remains to be verified for Palaestina II and Arabia. For the latter, Di Segni's argument that Kh. al-Daraya lay in the territory of Gerasa, despite using the era of the provincia Arabia in a mosaic inscription dated (probably) to AD 624 is doubtful. Di Segni holds that the position of this village 'in respect to Kh. al Maqatiya', which employed a Pompeian era (as a mosaic inscription dated to AD 482/3 confirms) makes it unlikely that Daraya belonged to the diocese of Bostra. And yet, there is no reason to believe that this was not the case: Kh. al-Maqatiya, which likely lay in Gerasene territory, is located ca. 14 km to the NW of Gerasa: Kh. al-Daraya is another 11 km to the NE of this village, or ca. 18.5 km to the N of Gerasa. Moreover, the village of Sa'ad, located only 11 km to the NE of Gerasa, employed the era of the provincia Arabia and mentioned a Ioannes, zygostates (a 'public weighter') of Bostra, as one of the benefactors of the church (see BE 1997 n.663), adding weight to the theory that the territory of Bostra could have extended this far to the south.

structures below. The broken mosaic floor in Y 125 was a sobering discovery, making as it does the prospect of finding intact mosaics here even more unlikely. In this context it is very fortunate that the mosaic medallion in the earlier trench was preserved at all: perhaps the additional reinforcement provided by the layer of hard lime applied over it at a later stage helped in this respect.

Owing to the significance of the mosaic inscription, however, the expedition also revealed a great deal more than expected. It is now clear that the large Byzantine-period complex on the tell was a monastery. It is possible that it is the *cenobium* mentioned in Cyril of Skythopolis' *Life of Saba*s as having been founded by Sabas (Vita Sabae 34) at the place where he retired to a cave 'by the river called Gadaron' (παρὰ τὸν λεγόμενον ποταμὸν Γαδάρων: 33 (ed. Schwartz 118.30-31)).[3] If the Tall Zar'ā monastery is indeed this one, it is interesting to note its possible early history according to Cyril of Skythopolis: the basis of the monastery was a cave, which calls to mind those along the valley edge of the natural stone platform upon which Tall Zar'ā evolved (although there are caves in the Yarmouk valley that are arguably more appropriate for this use). The date of the cave episode appears to be some time in the first decade of the 6th century. After Sabas receives an increasing number of visitors at the cave, he builds a cell (κελλίον: 34 (ed. Schwartz 120.5)) and several brethren settle down there. Once it becomes too overcrowded, Sabas retreats, and sometime later, one Eumathius inherits one of the cells and builds up a community at the site, making the place into a cenobium (κοινόβιον: 34 (120.9)).

Without more explicit evidence, we cannot be sure that the monastery on Tall Zar'ā is the one referred to in Cyril of Skythopolis, but the form and date of the structures so far discovered would fit with a foundation date in the 6th century and appear to belong to a large, *cenobium-style* monastery. The rows of rooms 5 x 5 m found in both Area II and Area III, the workshops in Area II and the agricultural installations in Area III all correspond to common features of Byzantine monasteries (see, e.g., Mampsis and *other in Negev cenobia in Figueras* 1995). Of great importance is, in any case, the fact that the Tall Zar'ā monastery was still in use and was even subjected to new building works several generations into Umayyad rule, as evidenced in the date of the mosaic.

Future work in Area III of Tall Zar'ā promises to be fruitful, and is likely to prioritise revealing the central monastic structure in its entirety. In this context, it will also be important to clarify both the extent and nature of earlier buildings immediately below, and further details as to the destruction of the site and its reuse in the early Islamic period.

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3. There are only two rivers that are near Gadara that Cyril can be referring to here: the Yarmouk to the north or the Wadi al-'Arab to the south, in which Tall Zar'ā is located. Three factors make the latter a more likely candidate: first, Greek texts usually refer to the Yarmouk by its Greek name: Hieromykes; second, the Yarmouk is a much longer river that rises 70 km to the east of Gadara and as such is unlikely to have been referred to using a name connected specifically to the city at its westernmost point; third, Sabas is described as having been visited in his cave by 'people from Skythopolis and Gadara' (34 (119.16)): the Wadi al-'Arab lies between these two cities, whilst the Yarmouk to the north is in the opposite direction to Skythopolis from Gadara.

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